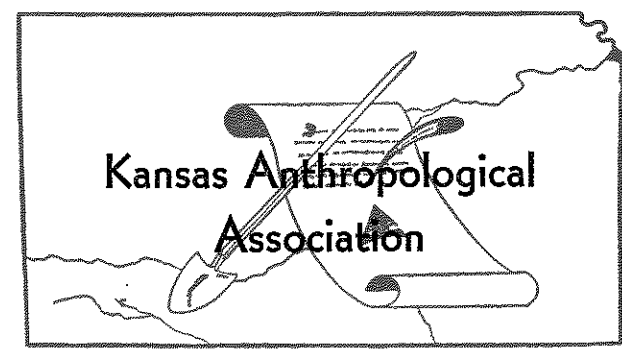


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NEWSLETTER

Volume 15, Number 4

December, 1969

ALLISON'S RANCH

by

Schulz

Ray S. Schultz

Any attempt to chronologically list and describe the various permanent structures at the Walnut Creek crossing on the Santa Fe Road would be virtually an impossible task. Most references have agreed that a former Santa Fe mail contractor by the name of William Allison from Independence, Missouri, was the first or at least head of the first party of traders to establish permanent residence in this area. Travellers to the region described buildings and construction in progress at one time and a year or two later other people would state that the same structures were going to be built.

The Kiowa Indians, who held several of their annual religious ceremonies of Sun Dances in the area and claimed dominion from the Smoky River south to the Red River, mentioned Allison in the Pictorial Calendar History for the year 1845 as operating a trading post (Mooney, 1898; 283).

In this winter Kodak-aka-i, "Wrinkled-neck," built a trading post on the South Canadian. The picture is sufficiently suggestive. This post was in the panhandle of Texas, on the north bank of the South Canadian (Guadal P'a, "Red River"), just above Bosque Grande creek and about 2 miles above the entrance of Red-deer creek (Koga-i P'a, "Elk creek"). It was in a swampy and well-timbered location, just west of one of the main trails from Arkansas river southward. It was owned by William Bent, called by the Kiowa Mantahakia ("Hook-noseman," "Roman-nose") who, in the spring of 1844, had built a trading post, as already noted, at Guadal Doha, higher up on the same river. Both were in charge of a clerk known to the Kiowa as K'odalakal, "Wrinkle-neck."

The removal of Bent's base of operations from the Arkansas to the Canadian seems to have marked the southward drifting of the tribes, in consequence of the destruction of the buffalo and the encroachments of the Dakota, as noted by Fremont and other western

explorers of this period. At the same time the Kiowa had dealings with another trading post, kept by William Allison, known to them as Tsodalhente, "Noarm," on Arkansas river at the junction of upper Walnut creek, in Kansas. As has been stated, the first trading post ever established in their country was built by Chouteau, on Cache creek, near the present Fort Sill.

Later in the winter of 1862-63 the Kiowa refer to Allison again (Mooney, 1898; 311).

Apatsat Sal, "Treetop winter," or Tsenko Sapan Etpata Sal, "Winter when horses ate ashes." This winter the Kiowa camped on upper Walnut creek (Tsodalhentedi P'a, "No-arm's river"), which enters the Arkansas at the Great Bend, in Kansas. There was unusually deep snow upon the ground, so that the horses could not get at the grass, and in their hunger tried to eat the ashes thrown out from the camp fires.

The summer of 1863 another reference is made to Allison (Mooney, 1898; 313).

Tsodalhente de P'a Kodo, "No-arm's river sun dance." The figure near the medicine lodge shows a man with his right arm gone.

This dance was held on the south side of Arkansas river, in Kansas, at the Great Bend, a short distance below the mouth of upper Walnut creek, called Tsodalhentedi P'a, "Armless man's creek," from a trader, William Allison, who kept a trading store at its mouth, on the east side, and who has lost his right arm from a bullet received in a fight with his stepfather, whom he killed in the encounter. From this circumstance the Kiowa knew him as Tsodalhente, or sometimes Manhenkia, "armless man" or "No-arm." He had as partners his half brother, John Adkins, known to the Kiowa as Kabodalte, "Left-handed," and another man named Booth. Fort Zarah was built in the immediate vicinity of Allison's trading post in 1864.

These seem to be the earliest references to the "ranch" or trading post and since no other references have been found we are inclined to give more credence to a date in the mid 1850's for the establishment of this settlement.

James J. Webb in his Adventures In the Santa Fe Trade states, ". . . two men formerly conductors of the mail from Independence to Santa Fe. I think it was in 1854 or 1855 they went to Walnut Creek and built a small mud fort." The two men traded in the summer and in the winter killed wolves for their pelts.

Established newspapers at Lawrence, Independence and Santa Fe ran news articles about the enterprise. On August 6, 1855 the Lawrence, Kansas Free State quoting the Independence, Missouri Occidental Messenger stated:

Mr. William Allison and Booth, known as famed prairie men, have determined to make a settlement at Walnut Creek on the Santa Fe road. A short time since . . . they started on an expedition to the gold region, their mules and provisions dying out . . . they abandoned the idea and returned here determined to settle on Walnut Creek. Booth left a month or so since and Allison this week, and from last reports of Booth's progress he was busily engaged in building houses and corrals, etc. This is the first attempt at building by citizens made west of Council Grove.

The Santa Fe Weekly Gazette, March 3, 1855 stated:

Walnut Creek Station Allison and Booth Respectfully informs their friends, and the public generally, that they have established a trading house and general depot at Walnut Creek, on the Santa Fe road; where they keep constantly on hand groceries, and provisions suitable for travellers. Also for Forage. With corrals and inclosures for the security of animals. Prices reasonable.

We have several descriptions of the different buildings and physical layouts, which varied and this is difficult to understand unless the buildings were changed or rebuilt. Also the exact locations are vague. Apparently in the 1860's more than one establishment was located at the crossing. We will proceed to quote some of the accounts we have discovered.

According to A.E. Rayond's 1859 diary, May 5 entry (Hafen, 1942):

Allison's ranch was built of poles inclosed with sod. The roof is nearly flat one story high. The stone walls and sods inclose about an acre of land. This affords a strong protection against Indians. Here is a mail station, Tavern, Corn and Hay etc.

The dimensions of the "store" are not exactly separated from the corral. Also we cannot determine if the house is of sod or stone or if the corral is of planted poles in a stockade manner.

In the diary of Charles C. Post - enroute to Pike's Peak in 1859 (Hafen, 1948; 4):

Tuesday, May 31st Camp No. 19. This day we passed Allison's ranch (or fort), Walnut Creek, and encamped about two miles from river. No water except slew water, which is so thick we could almost pick it up with our fingers.

Unfortunately Post gave no description of the place except he called it a ranch (or fort). The place would appear to have been designed by barricades, walls or stockade to resemble a fort or he would not have placed the words "or fort" in parenthesis.

The fact that the ranch was established and operating in 1857 is verified by two further accounts of eye witnesses. Joseph Cracklin of Lawrence made a trip to the Great Bend of the Arkansas in May of 1857 and the Lawrence Republican of June 25, 1857 recorded it with the following quotes.

We continued on as far as Walnut Creek, thirty miles beyond the bend(?) and found a poor, miserable country. Mr. Booth, at the Indian trading post, informed me that they had tried to raise corn and could not There were at the post about 80 Rappahoe Indians . . . we obtained some very nice robes. . . .

Mr. Cracklin, whose name, by the way, sounds the same as the cooked hog skins that are left after the lard is rendered out of them, remarked that he found a poor miserable country, and this was in the spring. Contrast his description with that of Max Greene when he visited the same area in the spring of 1854 (Green, 1856).

Seven miles west of the (Great) Bend the trail crosses Walnut Creek, whose border is prolific with the prairie gourd and well polato; and ornamented with the bright scarlet malva and silver-edged euphorbia; with here and there the blue flower of the cockle burr, and the prairie convolvulus (convolulus) From the river, and westward, extends a fine plain of buffalo grass.

One man found a beautiful country with flowers and good grass and two years later again in the spring another man saw only "a poor miserable country." It is little wonder that we find a mixed description of the buildings, locations, etc. at the crossing.

We find however two descriptions from travellers in the year 1858 both in the month of June, who described the ranch as a large, commodious house and corral built of logs of equal length set endwise in the ground (Lawrence Republican, October 28, 1858). Both observers remarked that the ranch was strong enough to resist attack of hundreds of Indians or white men unless they have the assistance of artillery.

Apparently this last reference to include white men was prompted by the murder of Mr. Booth, William Allison's partner the fall before by a Mexican, by splitting his head open with an ax (Santa Fe, N. M. Weekly Gazette, October 31, 1857). The culprit was arrested in New Mexico 3 weeks later.

Allison and Booth and apparently others such as John Adkins, previously referred to would freight such trade goods as they needed for trading with the Indians and provisions, harness, wagon repairs, ammunition and firearms to sell to the travellers upon the Santa Fe Trail, from Independence, Missouri. This business occupied their attention in the winter and in the spring and summer as soon as the grass was long enough to feed the livestock they would freight the robes and pelts to Missouri. Furs and robes received from the Indians, and their own hunting, were taken east and the provisions and merchandise for the trade would be brought back to the Walnut. The winters would be spent in taking buffalo robes and wolves skins.

The men would shoot a buffalo, poison the carcass with strychnine, and the gray wolves following the buffalo herds would be scattered dead over the prairie the next few days by the hundreds. Sometimes the men would market several thousand wolf pelts.

Allison had but one arm but he was fearless and could handle a gun as well as any man on the frontier.

"Uncle Dick" Wooton, who established a trading post later in Raton Pass, tells of Mexican teamsters mutinying at Ash Creek while east bound.

I rode ahead of the train to what was known as Bill Allison's Fort, twenty-eight miles from my battle ground. Allison was a brave daring fellow, who had established a trading post in the heart of the Indian country. In addition to trading with the Indians, he did a thriving business taking wolf skins. . . . When the train came up next morning, we rode out to meet it with four six-shooters each, stuck in our belts and rifles in our hands. As the teamsters came up, we compelled them to step to one side, and lay their guns, pistols and knives in a pile. The Americans were also required to give up their arms.

All these arms were stored away in Allison's fort, and we went on our way without arms, except such as were in the hands of myself and a few trusted employees. . . . (Conrad, 1890; 345)

Another traveller describes Allison as follows (Davis, 1918).

Mr. Allison in his buckskin suit was a fine specimen of frontiersman. He kept a fine stock of Indian goods and had a good trade with the Indians. All around the ranch buffalo by the hundreds, undisturbed, were grazing like cattle.

R. M. Wright an early day resident of Dodge City travelled the Santa Fe Trail often about this time related that in addition to the settlement at Council Grove, Peacock's ranch at Cow Creek that Allison had a ranch at Walnut Creek and William Griffenstein also had a ranch there (1901; 48 & 49).

Robert M. Peck related in 1857 (1903-04; 487-489):

Council Grove, a small village at this time was the farthest western settlement on the Santa Fe Trail in Kansas, except Allison's ranch at the mouth of the Walnut creek, five miles west of the Big Bend (the point where the Santa Fe road first strikes the Arkansas going west), and Bent's Fort on the upper Arkansas where Fort Wise was afterwards built. . . . Next morning we passed Allison's ranch, at the mouth of the Walnut creek. Be it understood that these frontier "ranches" as they were called, were mere trading posts, no efforts being made by the proprietors at any agricultural pursuits or stock-raising. They were there to catch the trade of travelers and Indians, and usually kept a small stock of such goods as the trade demanded. They also made profitable speculations in trading for the lame or give-out animals of passing trains or emigrant outfits, and after recuperating, selling them again to other travelers.

As a necessary precaution against Indian attacks, these ranches were always enclosed by walls or palisades, the ranch buildings being strung around the inside of the enclosure, leaving an open court or corral in the center of sufficient capacity to contain all the animals belonging to the establishment. For traffic with Indians a long, narrow opening, about waist-high, to be closed when need be by a drop-door on the inside, was made in that side of the storeroom that formed a part of the enclosing wall, through this slit trade with the redskins was conducted, thus avoiding the risk of admitting them to the enclosures. A watch tower was frequently built on a prominent corner of the wall, and in dangerous times a lookout maintained day and night.

In 1864 Theodore Welchweibaum notes (1909-10; 566):

We crossed the Arkansas river south of Larned, after we crossed the Pawnee fork we went east without seeing any Indians; but they saw us. We crossed the river near the mouth of Walnut creek, near Fort Zarah. (I ran a store there in 1864 and 1865, and made hay there for the government.)

Some time after the ranch was abandoned Bernard B. Smith came the following data (1880; 85):

There are many evidences of occupation surrounding the fort, such as cellars, remains and traces of ranches, huts, shanties, tents, etc. On section 36, township 19 south, range 13 west, about 100 rods south of the southeast corner of the reservation, near where the old toll-bridge crossed the Walnut, appears the most formidable ruins of any. At first sight there would seem to have been a fort there once; but it must be remembered that in those days herdsmen were obliged to build for defense. Besides, the "oldest inhabitant," Mr. H. H. Kidder, assures us that there was never a fort there--only a ranch. (One of the big problems in the field interpretation of the Allison Ranch buildings is that the original Fort Zarah structures were built on or very near the same site. Ed.) The main building is 70 feet north and south, by 30 feet across. A cross-wall divides it into two rooms, the north one being 30 feet square, the south one 30 by 40 feet. There are still some very heavy rocks in the foundation of the walls, though most of the material of which the walls were composed has long since been carried off. The debris is still 18 inches to 2 feet high. Attached to the southeast corner appears a hexagonal ruin of earth and rock, each of the sides about 12 feet long. On the west side of the building are earth-works, about 60 by 80 yards, with various cross-works and walls. These were the walls of the corral, which was divided into apartments. The present owner of the ground has some field crop growing over the ruins; but it seems like farming under difficulties, for the soil is not so rich and damp as ordinary prairie soil.

Smith comments on a cemetery location:

About 300 yards northeast of these ruins, in Sec. 31, T. 19, R. 12 W., is the old grave yard. This bears evidence of more recent use. There are about 18 or 20 graves in all; though many were difficult to distinguish, and there may be more or less. Many of the graves have no stone or stick to mark the spot, and can only be detected by a slight ridge or depression. Several have sandstones raised at the head and foot.

From the records at Fort Larned comes an interesting letter written near the end of the Allison Ranch period:

(From Part of Fort Larned Records.)
Camp Near Ft. Zarah, April 5, 1867

To the Asst. Adjutant General,
Dept. of Missouri

Sir:

I have the honor to report as follows with regard to Camp Zarah.

The troops stationed here consist of an officer and 21 men. . . . They are armed with the Spencer repeating rifles, with about sixty rounds of ammunition per man and more in reserve. . . .

The military reservation here is 4 miles square running two miles up and two miles down the Arkansas. Regarding the Round Tower as about the center of its southeastern side, with Walnut Creek running diagonally through it. I regard it as a judicious selection, I could not ascertain there were claimants to any portion of the land on this Reserve.

A trader named Rath (Rath was one of the ranch operators following Allison's death. Ed.) claims a stone building near the Round Tower as private property and also a toll bridge over Walnut Creek, at this point, as one of an incorporated company. He produces no legislative act of the State of Kansas granting this privilege, but simply a certification of incorporation before a Justice of the Peace.

The mail Station occupies a building on the south side opposite the round tower but have no proprietary claims to the land of my knowledge. I was told that the former Santa Fe mail contractors, Hall & Porter, had a section of land in every twenty miles donated to them by Act of Congress, and that one such section was located by them on Walnut Creek near the upper portion of the Military Reservation. I understand that the new contractors derive no title to this section from the old.

There are two public buildings of stone at Zarah. The material of which they are composed is a soft red sandstone, found in the bluffs bordering Walnut creek, four miles above Zarah. I consider it practically a good building stone for the character of the buildings probably required by the government here, not over one story high.

Rath, the trader, I learn, sells whiskey to the Indians, in violation of military orders and Act of Congress and should be put off the reservation.

John W. Davidson,
Acting Inspector General

The references provided in this paper have reviewed the early references and accounts of Allison's Ranch. As many members of the Kansas Anthropological Association worked on the Spring Dig in 1969 at this site it is hoped this review will be significant.

Great Bend, Kansas

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MEETINGS

Association meetings are held one or two times a year. The 1970 Spring meeting will be held in Hays, April 18, 1970 at the Memorial Union, Fort Hays College campus.